


Kluwer Mediation Blog

Old Man (a mediation parable)

Geoff Sharp (Brick Court Chambers / Clifton Chambers) · Tuesday, September 1st, 2015

From the documents I had been given beforehand, I knew he had substantial assets so I was surprised at his appearance when we met at the start of the day. 

He was an old man - I guessed well into his 70's, gaunt and gnarled. He looked to me like he had been on the land for many years - but I knew that he had not; my papers told me he had been successful in retail in Europe and only returned to New Zealand late in life. It had also been clear from the background that the family was not close.

No wife on the scene, perhaps dead - I didn't enquire. Two daughters and a son, all three of whom were at the mediation, all in their 50's. They treated him badly.

It took me by surprise. I was missing something, as mediators always do when we sit with families who are at war. He seemed too frail for them to do this to - beat up on him just because of what they wanted - for him to take a property off the market - they all but said it: 'we'll sell it when you're gone'.

Although I had no business to be, he could see I was worried. He pulled me aside late in the morning and what he said caught me off guard. I wasn't ready for the connection. I didn't think we had one. 'I've taught them too well' he said 'I was always too busy for them when they needed me - you reap what you sow...'

And then, as he told me what terms he was resigned to, he stared through me and out the window behind. He added, 'You know, at some point in your life you stop thinking of *time as passing and think of it as time remaining*.

I thought about that all the way home.

And I couldn't stop a sad song rattling around in my head...

*A child arrived just the other day,
He came to the world in the usual way.
But there were planes to catch, and bills to pay.
He learned to walk while I was away.
And he was talking 'fore I knew it, and as he grew,
He'd say, "I'm gonna be like you, dad.
You know I'm gonna be like you."*

*And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon,
Little boy blue and the man in the moon.
"When you coming home, dad?" "I don't know when,
But we'll get together then.
You know we'll have a good time then."*

*My son turned ten just the other day.
He said, "Thanks for the ball, dad, come on let's play.
Can you teach me to throw?"
I said, "Not today, I got a lot to do."
He said, "That's ok."
And he walked away, but his smile never dimmed,
Said, "I'm gonna be like him, yeah.
You know I'm gonna be like him."
*And the cat's in the cradle...**

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